

# IMPERIAL PROPAGANDA IN THE KONTAKIA OF ROMANOS THE MELODE

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AT THE BEGINNING of this paper, two main elements of the kontakia of Romanos the Melode should be stressed:<sup>1</sup> first, that the basic function of his hymns is liturgical, that they are an integral part of the divine service, close, in their catechetical function in the sixth century, to homilies;<sup>2</sup> second, that Romanos himself evidently sought to play a role as *melodos*, that is, writer, composer, and singer of hymns. He himself emphasizes both aspects many times, as the following example may demonstrate:

It is good to sing psalms and hymns to God,  
And to scourge with reproaches the demons  
Who are our eternal enemies. . . .  
. . . True pain grips Satan whenever we laud in  
our churches  
the thriambos over the demons.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from the Greek text of Romanos are taken from *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes*, ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons, 5 vols., SC 99, 110, 114, 128, 283 (Paris, 1964–81); translations are from E. Lash, *Kontakia on the Life of Christ: St. Romanos the Melodist*, The Sacred Literature Series (San Francisco, 1995), or from R. J. Schork, *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist* (Gainesville, 1995), or in some cases from M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist*, 2 vols. (Columbia, MO, 1970–73). See also R. Maisano, *Romano il Melode, Cantici*, 2 vols. (Turin, 2002), Greek text, Italian translation, and a rich commentary. Maisano relies on the edition of P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford, 1963). See also J. Koder, *Romanos Melodos, Die Hymnen, übersetzt und erläutert*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 2005–6). In the Greek texts cited in this article the spaces within the lines mark the transition from one *kolon* to another.

<sup>2</sup> See P. Allen, “The Sixth-Century Greek Homily: A Re-assessment,” in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, ed. M. B. Cunningham and eadem (Leiden–Boston, 1998): 201–25, and M. B. Cunningham, “The Sixth Century: A Turning-point for Byzantine Homiletics?” in *The Sixth Century: End or Beginning?*, ed. P. Allen and E. M. Jeffreys, *ByzAus* 10 (Brisbane, 1996): 176–86. But hymns in general, if they were sung jointly, also had a stimulating and uniting influence on the faithful.

<sup>3</sup> Ὑάλλειν ἐστὶ καλὸν καὶ ὑμνεῖν τὸν Θεὸν  
καὶ τιτρώσκειν ἐλέγχους τοὺς δαίμονας

The quotation underlines the significance that recitation or singing, in the beginning especially of psalms,<sup>4</sup> had from the early Christian period in the context of divine service of any kind: holy liturgies and prayer services (vigils), but also processions, which are mentioned by the pilgrim Egeria as early as the end of the fourth century.<sup>5</sup> As confirmed most recently by Derek Krueger, in the sixth century all forms of liturgy had undergone strong modifications, with a “trend toward increased reference to biblical history”;<sup>6</sup> the kontakia of Romanos had a decisive part in this development, especially for the night vigils.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the quotation demonstrates how Romanos saw himself, that is, as a singer of psalms and

πολεμίους ἀεὶ γενομένους ἡμῖν. . . .

. . . ὄντως πενθεῖ ὁ διάβολος, ὅταν δαιμόνων τὸν θρίαμβον

ἐν ἐκκλησίαις τρ[αγω]δῶμεν

(Romanos, H. 22.2, trans. R. J. Schork, with modifications).

<sup>4</sup> The entire *Letter to Marcellinus* of Athanasios of Alexandria (PG 27:12–45), for example, may be interpreted as a fervent plea for the singing of psalms and hymns.

<sup>5</sup> In the second part of her *itinerarium*, passim, cf. Egeria, *Journal de voyage*, ed. H. Pétré, SC 21, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1971). See J. F. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship* (Rome, 1987), 45ff.; G. A. B. Schneeweß, “Prozessionen in Konstantinopel,” in *Marienlexikon* (1993), 5:346–50; A. M(erkt), “Prozession,” in *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Leiden, 2001), 10:477–81.

In this context we should mention that Romanos wrote his *stichera* “On the Nativity” (H. 13, Grosdidier de Matons), probably before his arrival in Constantinople, for the traditional Christmas procession from Jerusalem to Bethlehem; see R. Stichel, “Die musizierenden Hirten von Bethlehem: Die Bedeutung der mittelalterlichen slavischen Übersetzungsliteratur für die byzantinische Lexikographie,” in *Lexicographica Byzantina*, ed. W. Hörandner and E. Trapp (Vienna, 1991), 249–82, esp. 264–67, and Koder, *Die Hymnen*, 1:377.

<sup>6</sup> See D. Krueger, “Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge–New York, 2005), 291–315, esp. 295.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, esp. for Romanos 297–300, and *idem*, “Writing and Redemption in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist,” *BMGS* 27 (2003): 2–44, esp. 15–18 (= *idem*, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* [Philadelphia, 2004], 167–69).

especially of the hymns which he himself had created.<sup>8</sup> The melodos emphasizes this aspect in other hymns as well; I quote here only a few characteristic examples:

I glorified your epiphany; grant me a clear sign!<sup>9</sup>

or:

My Father, holy and compassionate,  
may your name be ever hallowed  
by my mouth and by my lips,  
by my voice and by my song.  
Give me grace as I proclaim your hymns,  
for you can do so,  
who grants resurrection to the fallen.<sup>10</sup>

or:

Grant that I always sing hymns and praise to you  
in a pure community!  
Grant that my deeds correspond to my words,  
O almighty,  
in order that I may sing and accept requests from you.  
Grant me that I may present a pure prayer to you,  
the only Christ,  
who wants all men to be saved.<sup>11</sup>

It seems to me necessary to stress these central liturgical and prosopographical aspects because this paper, written from a perspective of political ideology, begins by asking the question, how strong was the influence

of the ecclesiastical hymns of the early Byzantine period—and especially the kontakia—on their public<sup>12</sup> and, more concretely, could the kontakion function as an instrument of political influence on the population of the Byzantine empire, and could the emperors—or, more generally, the ruling class of the empire—profit from this possibility.

## The Changing Elements of Mass Propaganda

Since the previously long-standing, non-Christian elements of mass propaganda—theater, gladiator tournaments, events of pagan religious worship—had lost their importance by the fifth century or had been forbidden outright, the question arises as to what exactly were the official or quasi-official forms of propaganda during the late Roman Empire in the new Christian environment. Chariot races, of course, were still held, and these events brought about mass assemblages, which were normally controlled by the circus factions—in the sixth century, the Greens and the Blues. It is characteristic that in *De ceremoniis* the following phrase occurs more than twenty times: *The prescribed acclamations have to be sung by the heralds and the people.*<sup>13</sup> But the main purpose of these assemblies was—at least from the viewpoint of the emperors—the acclamation of the emperors themselves.

Furthermore, the written sources document choral singing in honor of the emperors at least until the tenth century. A characteristic example is to be found in the well-known poems on the deaths of Leo the Wise and his son Constantine Porphyrogenitus, which have come down to us in the famous *Scylitzes Matritensis* manuscript (Bibl. Nac., vitr. 26-2).<sup>14</sup> Here, at the beginning of the third poem, a scholiast advises the choir to sing in the

8 For the first-person passages in the hymns of Romanos see now also D. Krueger, "Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium," in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, vol. 1, *Plenary Papers*, ed. E. Jeffreys (Aldershot, 2006), 255–74.

9 Ὑμνησα τὴν ἐπιφάνειάν σου· σημεῖον ποίησόν μοι ἐμφανές.  
(Romanos, H. 17.18, trans. M. Carpenter [n. 1 above])

10 Πάτερ μου ἅγιε καὶ φιλοικτίρμον,  
ἀγιασθήτω σου αἶν τὸ ὄνομα  
ἐν τῷ στόματί μου καὶ τοῖς χεῖλεσί μου,  
ἐν τῇ φωνῇ μου καὶ τῇ ᾠδῇ μου.  
δός μοι χάριν κηρύττοντι τοὺς ὕμνους σου, ὅτι δύνασαι,  
ὁ τοῖς πεσοῦσι παρέχων ἀνάστασιν  
(Romanos, H. 40.24, trans. E. Lash [n. 1 above], with modifications;  
note the traces of the Lord's Prayer.)

11 Ὑμνεῖν καὶ δοξολογεῖν σε  
ἐν πολιτείᾳ καθαρᾷ δόρησαι πάντοτε·  
συμπράττειν τοῖς λόγοις μου τὰ ἔργα εὐδόκησον, παντοδύναμε,  
ἵνα ψάλλω καὶ λαμβάνω παρὰ σοῦ τὰ αἰτήματα·  
ἀγνὴν εὐχὴν προσφέρειν σοι παράσχου μοι, μόνε Χριστέ,  
ὁ θέλων πάντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σωθῆναι.  
(Romanos, H. 55.15, trans. M. Carpenter, with modifications)

12 Cf. H. Hunger, "Romano il Melodo poeta, predicatore, retore—ed il suo pubblico," *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 25 (1983): 305–32 = "Romanos Melodos, Dichter, Prediger, Rhetor—und sein Publikum," *JÖB* 34 (1984): 15–42.

13 Τὰ δὲ τῆς εὐφημίας ἄκτα ἄδονται παρὰ τε τῶν κρακτῶν καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis*, ed. I. Reiske (Bonn, 1829–30), part 1: 31.3, 13, 20; 32.20; 33.3, 11, 24, 32; 37.6; 39.19; 40.10, 26; 43.11, 32; 44.7, 13, 17, 21, 27, 31; 45.8, 12, 17.

14 I. Ševčenko, "Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Skylitzes," *DOP* 23–24 (1969–70): 187–228.

*echos plagios deuterios*, the second plagal mode,<sup>15</sup> a mode also used frequently (in 15 hymns) by Romanos. But these manifestations reached mainly the inhabitants of the capital and its environs, and they are found only seldom and on ceremonial occasions. Moreover, the assemblies in the Hippodrome could become rather dangerous for the potentates, as Justinian himself experienced on the occasion of the Nika riot in 532.<sup>16</sup>

Presuming that in the sixth century Christianity had already had a formative influence on Mediterranean civilization and had become deeply rooted in the greater part of Byzantine society (and this independently from the extent of individual religious convictions or the still existing pagan cults),<sup>17</sup> I would argue that church congregations, which gathered at regular and frequent intervals, presented the most timely and effective possibility for a lasting and stable influence over the masses throughout the Byzantine empire. The regular, probably weekly, church-going of the faithful, who attended not only the divine service every Sunday but also the prayers on the eves before feast days, presented, in my view, a unique opportunity to exert pressure on the broad masses to submit themselves to the emperor's rule, to love him and to trust him. This possibility of influence is demonstrated to a certain degree already in the fixed parts of the liturgical texts. For example, in the two most common liturgies, those of Basil the Great and John Chrysostom, recitation of the prayer "for the most faithful emperors . . . for the entire imperial household and the army"<sup>18</sup> was not only obligatory but a self-evident act of loyalty to the political system and its leaders.

Of a clearly different nature are the kontakia, because here—as in the homilies<sup>19</sup>—the themes changed from

feast to feast, from eve (*pannychis*) to eve, often in relation to the Epistles and Gospels of the day or the following feast.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the kontakia offered the possibility of adding or inserting into the interpretation of the Scriptures—be it consciously or not—topics of current interest and ideas that might stimulate the devotion of the faithful to the emperor.

The question arises as to whether this benefit is perceptible only through our eyes, or whether the Byzantines themselves were aware of this advantage of the kontakia. And, if the latter, did this political and ideological stimulation by the author occur intentionally and consciously, or subconsciously? A categorical answer, of course, is impossible. But in the wake of the Nika incidents of 532 (if not earlier), the emperor Justinian must have realized that the traditional textual means of self-representation and propaganda for his political positions and religious and ethical convictions, above all, the prooemia of the laws,<sup>21</sup> were ineffective at influencing the masses, and that he had to search for new possibilities. Therefore, though the basic texts of his codification still had to be published necessarily in the traditional legal language, Latin, after the Nika riot the emperor felt it necessary to express himself to his subjects in Constantinople and in the Eastern part of the empire in more convincing and direct ways. He thus decided—though not without hesitations<sup>22</sup>—after 534 that the *novellae* should be

15 See E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1961), 300–303, and J. Handschin, *Das Zeremonienwerk Kaiser Konstantins und die sangbare Dichtung* (Basel, 1942), 60–62.

16 For a general interpretation of the stasis of masses see D. Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie: Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 137–45 and 216–23.

17 See T. E. Gregory, "The Survival of Paganism in Christian Greece: A Critical Survey," *AJP* 107 (1986): 229–42, and F. R. Trombley, "Paganism in the Greek World at the End of Antiquity: The Case of Rural Anatolia and Greece," *HTR* 78 (1985): 327–52.

18 ὑπὲρ τῶν πιστοτάτων βασιλέων . . . παντὸς τοῦ παλατίου καὶ τοῦ στρατοπέδου αὐτῶν; see F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* (Oxford, 1896; repr. 1965), 333.

19 For the significance of preaching see, e.g., Av. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–Oxford, 1991), 79, 84, 160f.

20 Cf. J. Grosdidier de Matons, "Liturgie et Hymnographie," *DOP* 34–35 (1980–81): 35ff., and amendments by A. Lingas, "The Liturgical Place of the Kontakion in Constantinople," in *Liturgy, Architecture, and Art in the Byzantine World: Papers of the XVIIIth International Byzantine Congress*, ed. C. C. Akentiev (St. Petersburg, 1995), 50–57.

21 See P. E. Pieler, "Die juristische Literatur im Zeitalter Justinians," in H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 2:400–428; M. Maas, "Roman History and Christian Ideology in Justinianic Reform Legislation," *DOP* 40 (1986): 17–31; C. Pazdernik, "Justinianic Ideology and the Power of the Past," in Maas, *Cambridge Companion* (n. 6 above), 185–214.

22 Already the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III used Greek as a legislative language (see S. Troianos, "Römisches Recht und Byzantinisches Recht: Juristische Kuriosa bei den 'Exhellenismoi'," in *Byzantine Law: Proceedings of the International Symposium of Jurists 1998*, ed. C. Papastathis [Thessalonike, 2001], 15–20), but Justinian was the first to introduce Greek systematically, arguing as follows: "We wrote the law not in our father's tongue (sc. in Latin), but in this common and helladic, in order that it might become well-known to all thanks to the ease of interpretation" (nov. 7.1 prooimion: οὐ τῇ πατρίῳ φωνῇ τὸν νόμον συνεγράψαμεν, ἀλλὰ ταύτῃ τῇ κοινῇ καὶ ἐλλάδι, ὥστε ἅπανσιν αὐτὸν εἶναι γνώριμον διὰ τὸ πρόχειρον τῆς ἐρμηνείας); see also nov. 66.1.2: "(This law) was written in the language of the Greeks, because it is suitable for the majority, but also in the language of the Romans, which is the most dominant because of the state system" (τῆς μὲν τῇ ἐλλήνων

published in Greek as well as in Latin. Justinian also realized that the kontakion could serve as the newest and most up-to-date means of communication. Probably he observed the influence on the faithful masses of church hymns such as the *Akathistos Hymn*<sup>23</sup> and the kontakia of Romanos himself.<sup>24</sup> He initiated the use of the kontakion for his purposes for the first time on the occasion of the reconstruction of the church of Hagia Sophia, and for this reason he commissioned from Romanos the well-known kontakion “On Earthquakes and Conflagration,” which was very likely recited for the first time in 537 during the great fasting period of Lent, approximately ten months before the official inauguration of Justinian’s Hagia Sophia on December 27th of the same year.<sup>25</sup> We do not know with certainty if Romanos wrote this kontakion by order of the emperor, but the probability is high.<sup>26</sup>

φωνῇ γεγραμμένης διὰ τὸ τῷ πλήθει κατάλληλον, τῆς δὲ τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἡπερ ἔστι καὶ κυριωτάτη διὰ τὸ τῆς πολιτείας σχῆμα); see H. Zilliacus, *Zum Kampf der Weltsprachen im Oströmischen Reich* (Helsingfors, 1935; repr. 1965), 70ff. An important factor might have also been that Greek was the language of diplomatic negotiations with the Sasanian government (τῇ ἐλληνίδι φωνῇ. . . σπονδαὶ περσιστὶ καὶ ἐλληνιστί: Menander Protektor, in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De leg.* 1:176.11–17, de Boor, ed.), cf. C. Gastgeber, “Die Übersetzungsabteilung der byzantinischen Kaiserkanzlei unter den Komnenen und Angeloi,” unpublished thesis [Vienna, 2001], 90f.). See also J. Koder, “Griechische Identitäten im Mittelalter: Aspekte einer Entwicklung,” in *Byzantium State and Society: In Memory of Nikos Oikonomides*, ed. A. Avramea, A. Laiou, and E. Chrysos (Athens, 2003), 297–319, here 300f.

23 For the date of the *Akathistos*, probably immediately after the Council of Ephesus in 431, see L. M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden–Boston–Cologne, 2001), 219–30.

24 Perhaps the emperor was even inspired to compose, himself, the troparion Ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός (M. Amelotti and L. M. Zingale, eds., *Scritti teologici ed ecclesiastici di Giustiniano* [Milan, 1977], 44), though his authorship is questionable, cf. V. Grumel, “L’auteur et la date de la composition du tropaire Ὁ μονογενὴς,” *EO* 22 (1923): 398–418. K.-H. Uthemann, “Kaiser Justinian als Kirchenpolitiker und Theologe,” *Augustinianum* 39 (1999): 5–83 (= idem, *Christus, Kosmos, Diatribe: Themen der frühen Kirche als Beiträge zu einer historischen Theologie*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 93 [Berlin–New York, 2005], 257–331), here 38f., proposes a date between 532 and the definitive breach with the Monophysites in 536, and emphasizes the correspondence of the hymn with Justinian’s position as expressed in the edict of 533, but he is doubtful on Justinian’s authorship.

25 Following J. H. Barkhuizen, “Romanos Melodos: On Earthquakes and Fires,” *JÖB* 45 (1995): 1–18; K. Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ ὑμνογραφία*, 2nd ed. (Athens, 1986), 389f., proposes the date of the laying of the foundation stone as the end of 532 or the first months of 533.

26 For detailed analysis of this *kontakion* see E. Catafygiotu Topping, “On Earthquakes and Fires: Romanos’ Encomium to Justinian,” *BZ* 71 (1978): 22–25; J. H. Barkhuizen, “Romanos and the Nika Riots: A

The reason for the reconstruction of the Great Church is known: During the Nika riot of 532 the old Hagia Sophia was burned to the ground, and the emperor commissioned the building of an entirely new, much larger and more resplendent church. The conflagration was probably welcomed by Justinian, not only as an opportunity to intensify imperial propaganda, an opportunity which nearly automatically accompanies such a building program,<sup>27</sup> but also as an occasion to attempt to outstrip Anicia Juliana, since their lasting rivalry did not end even with her death in 527/28. She was a member of an old Roman patrician family and daughter of Flavius Anicius Olybrius, who reigned as emperor of the West for seven months in 472. Her son, who had the same name as his maternal grandfather, was married to Irene, a niece of the emperor Anastasius, and served as consul in 491. He was both exiled and then recalled from exile in 533;<sup>28</sup> perhaps he had supported the Nika riot, with the purpose of regaining power for the old senatorial families, a plan that failed in the end. As part of this plan, Anicia Juliana had invested an important part of her fortune in the construction and restoration of several churches. Among the most prominent of these projects was the restoration between 518 and 523 of the Euphemia church *en tois Olybriois*, originally erected by her great-grandfather, the emperor Theodosios II, as well as the construction of the Polyeuktos church, which Martin Harrison dates originally to 524–27. Jonathan Bardill has now suggested, however, redating the commencement of the building of St. Polyeuktos to ca. 507/8, under Anastasius, and its completion soon after 521/22, no later than the mid-520s, and in any case before Justinian became augustus in April 527.<sup>29</sup>

Fragments of the Polyeuktos church’s magnificent inscription, found during excavation, document the incorporation into the entablature of at least major portions

Religious Perspective,” *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, n.s. 1 (1990): 30–39; idem, “Romanos Melodos”; K. Nickau, “Justinian und der Nika-Aufstand bei Romanos dem Meloden: Zum *Kontakion* 54 M.-Tr. (= 54 Gr.),” *BZ* 95 (2002): 603–20, and L. Silvano, “Echi di propaganda giustiniana in un contacio di Romano il Melodo (no 54 Maas-Trypanis),” *Porphyra* 3 (2004): 107–20; M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen, 2003), 631–34.

27 This is indirectly confirmed by Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.1.21f.

28 Cf. *PLRE* 2:626 (Irene), 635f. (Anicia Juliana 3) and 795 (Olybrius 3).

29 J. Bardill, *Byzantine Brickstamps* (Oxford, 2004), 62–64, 111–16.

of the 76-hexameter epigram that is fully preserved in the first collection of the *Palatine Anthology* (1.10).<sup>30</sup> The author of the epigram informs us (in vv. 30–33) that with this basilica Juliana had completed a most ambitious and deluxe building program consisting of “innumerable” churches, and he emphasizes that, in constructing the Polyeuktos church, Juliana had even surpassed the biblical king Solomon:<sup>31</sup>

She alone . . . surpassed the wisdom of renowned  
Solomon,  
raising to receive God a temple of which the ages  
cannot celebrate the richly wrought and graceful  
splendour.<sup>32</sup>

The poet’s statement matches the observation of the excavator, Martin Harrison, that the metrological base of the church was not, as one would expect, the Byzantine foot, but in fact the “royal yard” (βασιλικὸς πῆχυς, equal to 0.518 m), which was the module of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Harrison demonstrated that the size of the ground plan of the Polyeuktos church was 100

royal yards square, following the model of the *templum Salomonis* as described in the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup>

Justinian had engaged in strong competition with Anicia Juliana ever since he began his rise to power in 518, and he answered her demonstrations of imperial claim in the same way, by building churches;<sup>34</sup> in this context we should mention two churches that were planned or erected near the palace of Hormisdas during the reign of Justin, namely Sts. Peter and Paul (518–20) and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, today’s Küçük Aya Sofya (probably finished in 527, and for which Brian Croke,<sup>35</sup> who proposes that “both churches were part of a single original plan,” places the planning and commencement in the early 520s), and after 527, of course, also Hagia Sophia (532–37). For the first two churches mentioned here, the emperor contented himself also with epigrams that are recorded either in the *Palatine Anthology* (Sts. Peter and Paul)<sup>36</sup> or in the church itself (Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, where the epigram praises the σκηπτοῦχος Ἰουστινιανός and prays for the increase of the κράτος θεοστεφέους Θεοδώρης).

There is no doubt that epigrams in hexameters, like all inscriptions, originally were intended to influence the mass public, but in the reality of late antiquity they were written by a well-educated poet for *one* recipient or for a small group of recipients who were literate.<sup>37</sup> Some of the epigrams were in fact carved inside the churches, but their lofty placement, often even at the height of the cornice, allowed the faithful to be impressed more by the splendor

30 Identification by C. Mango and I. Ševčenko, “Remains of the Church of St. Polyeuktos at Constantinople,” *DOP* 15 (1961): 243–47.

31 It is necessary to repeat here neither the often-told story of the rivalry between Justinian’s Hagia Sophia and Anicia Juliana’s Hagios Polyeuktos, nor the discussion on the topos of Solomon’s temple; for a detailed discussion of the written sources and the archeological evidence see M. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavations of Anicia Juliana’s Palace-Church in Istanbul* (London, 1989); idem, *Excavations at Sarayhan in Istanbul* (Princeton, 1986); P. Speck, “Juliana Anicia, Konstantin der Große und die Polyeuktos-Kirche in Konstantinopel,” in *Varia 3 / Poikila Byzantina* 11 (Bonn, 1991); G. Fowden, “Constantine, Silvester and the Church of S. Polyeuctus in Constantinople,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994): 274–84; C. Milner, “The Image of the Rightful Ruler: Anicia Juliana’s Constantine Mosaic in the Church of Hagios Polyektos,” in *New Constantines*, ed. P. Magdalino (Aldershot, 1994), 73–81; J. Koder, “Justinians Sieg über Salomon,” in *Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη της Δασκαρίνας Μπούρα* (Athens, 1994), 135–42; C. Connor, “The Epigram in the Church of Hagios Polyektos in Constantinople and its Byzantine Response,” *Byzantion* 69 (1999): 479–528; M. V. Pizzone, “Da Melitene a Constantinopoli: S. Polieucto nella politica dinastica di Giuliana Anicia: Alcune osservazioni in margine ad AP 1.10,” *Maia* 55 (2003): 107–32; H.-R. Toivanen, “The Church of St Polyektos: Archaeology and Texts,” *Acta Byzantina Fennica* 2 (2004): 127–50; I. Shahîd, “The Church of Hagios Polyektos in Constantinople: Some Observations,” in *Graeco-Arabica: Festschrift in Honour of V. Christides*, ed. G. K. Livadas (Athens, 2004), 343–55.

32 καὶ σοφίην παρέλασεν ἀειδομένου Σολομώνος  
νῆδον ἀναστήσασα θεηδόχον, οὗ μέγας αἰών  
οὐ δύναται μέλψαι χαρίτων πολυδαίδαλον αἶγλην  
(*The Greek Anthology*, W. R. Paton, ed. [New York–London, 1925–27], 1.10, v. 48–50; see also Harrison, *Temple*, 34.)

33 3 Kings 5:15ff., 6:1ff., 2 Paralipomena. 1:18–5:1; see “Tempel von Jerusalem,” *LThK* 9 (1964): 1350–58; P. v. Naredi-Rainer, *Salomos Tempel und das Abendland: Monumentale Folgen historischer Irrtümer* (Cologne, 1994), 118–22 (bibliographical information from Matthew Savage, Vienna); Koder, “Justinians Sieg,” 135–42.

34 See D. Feissel, “Les édifices de Justinien au témoignage de Procope et de l’épigraphie,” in *Le De aedificiis de Procope: le texte et les réalités documentaires*, Antiquité Tardive 8 (Turnhout, 2000), 88f.

35 B. Croke, “Justinian, Theodora and the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus,” *DOP* 60 (2006): 25–63, esp. 50. See also I. Shahîd, “The Church of Sts Sergios and Bakchos in Constantinople: Some New Perspectives,” in *Byzantium State and Society: In Memory of Nikos Oikonomides* (Athens, 2003), 467–80, with reference to C. Connor, “The Epigram in the Church of Hagios Polyektos in Constantinople and its Byzantine Response,” *Byzantion* 59 (1999): 379–527.

36 See *The Greek Anthology*, 1.8, v. 48–50.

37 I would not deny that inscriptions, especially those which were attached to statues, could have some influence on the inhabitants of early Byzantine cities, as demonstrated by C. Roueché, “Written Display in the Late Antique and Byzantine City,” in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, vol. 1, *Plenary Papers*, ed. E. Jeffreys (Aldershot, 2006), 235–53, but I would argue that these inscriptions had no influence on the masses.

and the brilliance of the gilt letters than by their content. Furthermore, even of those who knew how to read, only a very few were able, thanks to a profound classical education, to understand the antiquated, atticizing idiom of the epigrams or to appreciate the hexameters.<sup>38</sup>

## Justinian, Hagia Sophia, and Romanos's Lenten Hymn

I would suggest that the emperor had come to this conclusion as well. For this reason he commissioned from Romanos a Lenten hymn that should combine the praise for the emperor and the propaganda of his political agenda with his religious convictions, his appeal for repentance, humility, and devoutness (also appropriate to Lent).

Furthermore, as I have demonstrated earlier,<sup>39</sup> it is very likely that the person who conveyed the imperial order to the melodos charged him to “answer” directly the epigram at the Polyeuktos church that praised Anicia Juliana. With his kontakion “On Earthquakes and Conflagration” Romanos met all these expectations and, furthermore, he wrote at a linguistic level that was close

to the vernacular language of the sixth century,<sup>40</sup> though “it would be misleading to equate it with the colloquial idiom”<sup>41</sup> of Romanos's lifetime.

From the very beginning, this hymn advises the inhabitants of Constantinople that, if they want to escape eternal punishment, only repentance and obedience will make them worthy of God's absolution and indulgence:

Lord, do not ignore those gripped by affliction,  
Those who cry out in repentance to you, Savior:  
In your compassion give all men  
eternal life!<sup>42</sup>

And he continues with the affirmation that God always wants the salvation of mankind. For this reason he tries to lead them to repent:

Who else searches for us and rescues us from danger?  
Does not Christ himself turn toward us every day  
and summon us? Should we not listen?  
For, just like a concerned father, he advises self-  
control,  
so he can supply  
eternal life.<sup>43</sup>

But if mankind does not obey God and instead refuses to repent, then—says Romanos—God, as *philanthropos*, will subject man to temporal punishment already in this life. Thus, God sent to the inhabitants of Constantinople in the time of Justinian three “plagues” (πληγές):<sup>44</sup> first, an earthquake (which we may identify with one of the

38 Comparable, for example, are epigrams related to icons and other pictorial representations; they were—in spite of their archaisms—to a certain extent understandable for a reader who was acquainted with their vocabulary from texts with similar contents, but not for a wider audience. See examples in H. Maguire, *Image and Imagination: The Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response* (Toronto, 1996); admittedly, for some of these epigrams even this is not true, e.g., the poem of Theodore Prodromos (quoted in *ibid.*, n. 45) or the inscription on a Moscow icon of the fifteenth century (*ibid.*, n. 53).

39 Koder, “Justinians Sieg” (n. 31 above).

40 The language of Romanos is described in an excellent manner by Enrica Follieri as “*koinè* del mondo greco postclassico, con molti elementi tratti dalla lingua parlata e copiosi riecheggiamenti dei testi biblici”; see E. Follieri, “L'innografia bizantina dal contacio al canone,” in *Da Bisanzio a San Marco: Musica e liturgia*, ed. G. Cattin (Bologna, 1991), 1–32, esp. 9, quoted by Silvano, “Echi di propaganda” (n. 26 above), 119; Follieri adds that his vocabulary is rich though simple, and therefore also accessible for a “pubblico non necessariamente tutto colto.” For the language of Romanos see also K. Mitsakis, *The Language of Romanos the Melodist*, ByzArch 11 (Munich, 1967); J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris, 1977), 285–27; and Cameron, *Christianity* (n. 19 above), 112 and 194s. Odysseas Elytis's statement, that Romanos “έγραψε στην κοινή του καιρού του, μια μεταβατική φάση της ελληνικής, που—υπάρχουνε πολλά δείγματα—τη χειρίσθηκε με τους δισταγμούς και τα παραπατήματα ενός ξένου,” because he used words that “δεν υπήρχαν καθόλου στην κυκλοφορία και τις έπλασε” or

“τις άντλησε από παλαιότερα στρώματα ή τις χρησιμοποίησε, από άγνοια, παραφθαρμένες” (O. Elytis, “Ρωμανός ο Μελωδός,” *En leuko* [Athens, 1992], 41f.), does not bear close examination.

41 M. Alexiou, *After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor* (Ithaca–London, 2002), 54.

42 Τοὺς ἐν θλίψει, κύριε, κατεχομένους  
μὴ παρίδῃς κρίζοντας ἐν μετανοίᾳ σοι, σωτήρ.  
Τῇ εὐσπλαγχνίᾳ σου δώρησαι  
πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον.  
(Romanos, H. 54.prooimion, trans. R. J. Schork [n. 1 above])

43 Τίς ἡμᾶς δὲ ἐξελεῖται καὶ ῥύσεται ἄρα ἐν ἀνάγκῃ;  
Καὶ μὴ αὐτὸς ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς καθ' ἐκάστην  
προτρεπόμενος καλεῖ, καὶ οὐ φρονοῦμεν;  
Ὡσπερ γὰρ πατήρ ἐπάγει τὴν σωφροσύνην  
ἵνα παράσχη ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον.  
(Romanos, H. 54.7, trans. R. J. Schork)

44 Comparable to the Egyptian plagues in the Old Testament, cf. Exodus 7–12.

earthquakes in the years 526–29); it was followed by a famine, which may be connected with a drought in the autumn of 530; finally the third, most terrifying, punishment was the Nika riot.

The Creator delivered a first blow, and a second, but  
he did not find  
that men were becoming better—rather, progressively  
worse.  
So, he placed despair on the very altar of grace  
and allowed to burn the hallowed precincts of the  
churches,  
just as he once handed the sacred Ark over to the  
foreigners.  
The wails of the mob poured out  
in the city's streets and churches,  
for fire would have destroyed everything, if God had  
not come  
and given to us all  
eternal life.<sup>45</sup>

Only then did the Byzantines realize that God had sent them the “plagues” in order to exhort them to search their hearts:

The city was buried beneath these horrors and cried  
in great sorrow.  
Those who feared God stretched their hands out to  
him,  
begging for compassion and an end to the terror.  
Reasonably, the emperor—and his empress—were in  
these ranks,  
their eyes lifted in hope toward the Creator:  
“Grant me victory,” he said, “just as you made David  
victorious over Goliath. You are my hope.  
Rescue, in your mercy, your loyal people

- 45 Μίαν, δευτέραν τὴν πληγὴν ὁ κτίστης ἐπιφέρων, ἀνθρώπους  
δὲ εὐρίσκων  
κρείττους μὴ γινομένους, ἀλλὰ καὶ χείρους ἑαυτῶν,  
τότε ἀθυμίαν ἐπιφέρει εἰς αὐτὴν  
τὴν τράπεζαν τῆς χάριτος,  
καυθῆναι συγχωρήσας τὰ ἅγια τὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας,  
ὡς καὶ πρῶην ἀλλοφυλοῖς ἐκδέδωκε κιβωτὸν τὴν θεῖαν·  
καὶ ἐξεχέτο ὁ θρῆνος τοῦ πληθους  
ἐν πλατείαις τε ὁμοῦ καὶ ἐκκλησίαις·  
τὰ πάντα γὰρ πῦρ διέφθειρεν, εἰ μὴ ἔσχον  
† Θεὸν τὸν παρέχοντα πᾶσιν † ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον.  
(Romanos, H. 54.14, trans. R. J. Schork, with modifications)

and grant them  
eternal life.”<sup>46</sup>

God has mercy on the Byzantines and brings the riot  
and the conflagration to an end. Immediately Justinian  
orders the construction of the new Hagia Sophia:

Remember Jerusalem and its mighty temple:  
the all-wise king Solomon, over a very long period,  
built and adorned that temple at a countless cost.  
Yet it was destroyed and exposed to derision.  
It remains fallen. It has not risen again.  
From this, one understands the grace of the church,  
which gives  
eternal life.<sup>47</sup>

The people of Israel lost their Temple. In its place we  
now have  
the churches of the Resurrection and Sion,  
which Constantine and the faithful Helena gave to  
the world,  
two hundred and fifty years after the destruction of  
the Temple.  
But here in the Imperial City people began the task  
of raising the churches only one day after their fall.  
The project gleams in glory and is being brought to  
perfection.

- 46 Ὑπὸ μὲν τούτων τῶν δεινῶν κατείχετο ἡ πόλις καὶ θρῆνον εἶχε  
μέγα·  
Θεὸν οἱ δεδιότες χεῖρας ἐξέτεινον αὐτῷ  
ἐλεημοσύνην ἐξαιτοῦντες παρ' αὐτοῦ  
καὶ τῶν κακῶν κατάπαυσιν·  
σὺν τούτοις δὲ εἰκότως ἐπηύχετο καὶ ὁ βασιλεύων  
ἀναβλέψας πρὸς τὸν πλάστην —σὺν τούτῳ δὲ σύνευνος ἡ  
τούτου—  
Δός μοι, βοῶν, σωτήρ, ὡς καὶ τῷ Δαυίδ σου  
τοῦ νικῆσαι Γολιάθ· σοὶ γὰρ ἐλπίζω·  
σῶσον τὸν πιστὸν λαόν σου ὡς ἐλεήμων,  
οἷσπερ καὶ δώσης ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον.  
(Romanos, H. 54.18, trans. R. J. Schork, with modifications)  
In this quotation, the imperial couple appears for the first time.
- 47 Ἄν γάρ τις ἀπίδῃ πρὸς τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ  
καὶ τὸν ναὸν τὸν μέγιστον  
ὃν Σολομὼν ἐκείνος ὁ πάνσοφος χρόνῳ μακροτάτῳ  
ἀνεγείρας καὶ κοσμήσας ἐποίκιλε πλούτῳ ἀπεράντῳ,  
ὅπως καταβληθεὶς εἰς ὕβριν ἐδόθη  
καὶ μένει ἐκπεσὼν καὶ οὐκ ἀνέστη,  
ἴδοι ἂν αὐτῆς τὴν χάριν τῆς ἐκκλησίας  
ἥτις παρέχει ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον.  
(Romanos, H. 54.21, trans. R. J. Schork, with modifications)

The emperor and empress are proud of their  
generosity;  
but it is the Lord who gives  
eternal life.<sup>48</sup>

Thanks to the help of God, the church of Hagia Sophia was finished in the shortest possible amount of time, whereas the temple of Solomon (in reality the temple of Herod) remained ruined for 250 years, from 70 AD, when it was destroyed by the Romans, until 327, when St. Helen, with the support of her son Constantine the Great, began to build in the same place the churches of the Resurrection and Sion. Romanos refers explicitly to the temple of Solomon and indirectly to the epigram in the Polyeuktos church, and thus declares that only emperors—Justinian himself, like his predecessor Constantine the Great—and no other persons (such as Anicia Juliana) are justified in comparing themselves to those kings of the Old Testament David and Solomon. That Romanos's reference to the temple of Solomon was not accidental but corresponded to an imperial program is documented by the (later) tradition in the *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* attributing to Justinian the well-known saying, "Praise God who deemed me worthy of achieving such a work! I defeated you, Solomon!"<sup>49</sup>

The hymn, like nearly every kontakion, ends in a prayer (H. 54.25): Romanos prays for the salvation of the emperors and "the entire community (of the city)" (πάσης τῆς πολιτείας). Finally, a further remarkable aspect can be cited, namely, the harmony of this hymn with the prooimia and texts of Emperor Justinian's novels 77 (undated) and 141 (ca. 559),<sup>50</sup> although a direct textual dependency must be excluded. Both authors stress

God's immense love for men (*philanthropia*), which He feels and expresses all the more for sinners;<sup>51</sup> both also declare that God wishes conversion (*epistrophe*) and eternal life for all men.<sup>52</sup> In general, both speak about God's readiness to punish those who persist in sin, by sending famines, earthquakes, and pestilence,<sup>53</sup> but also His readiness to save the *polis* and the *politeia* when men show contrition and return to a pious way of life.<sup>54</sup> In summary, it can be stated that hymn 54 shows clearly how close Romanos's theological and ethical positions were to Justinian's principles.

## Other Hymns of Romanos Ordered by Justinian

For the emperor, the kontakion "On Earthquakes and Conflagration" may have been the incentive to commission entire hymns or supplements to already-existing hymns (additional prooimia or oikoi), from which he also expected (at least indirectly) moral support for his person and his policies. Before mentioning examples of such commissions being made after 537, we have to state explicitly that the hymns can be dated only approximately and that, although it is not certain whether or not the imperial court in fact gave pertinent orders, the evidence from (at least) five hymns indicates it was likely.

The first example is the "Hymn on the Meeting of Our Lord," which may be connected with the upgrading of the feast of *Hypapante* and its transfer by the emperor from the 14th to 2nd of February in 542.<sup>55</sup> At its beginning two (of three) prologues refer to the emperor:

Exalt the horn of our faithful rulers!  
Give them might by your power, O Word!

48 Λαὸς μὲν ὁ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ναοῦ ἀποστερεῖται· ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀντ' ἐκείνου  
Ἀνάστασιν ἁγίαν καὶ τὴν Σιών ἔχομεν νῦν,  
ἦν περ Κωνσταντῖνος καὶ Ἑλένη ἡ πιστὴ  
τῷ κόσμῳ ἐδωρήσαντο  
μετὰ διακοσίους πεντήκοντα χρόνους τοῦ πτωθῆναι.  
Ἀλλ' ἐνταῦθα μετὰ μίαν τῆς πτώσεως ἤρξαντο ἡμέραν  
τὸ τῆς ἐκκλησιᾶς ἐγείρεσθαι ἔργον·  
καὶ φαῖδρύνεται λαμπρῶς καὶ τελειοῦται·  
οἱ μὲν βασιλεῖς δαπάνην φιλοτιμοῦνται,  
ὁ δὲ δεσπότης ζῶν τὴν αἰώνιον.

(Romanos, H. 54.22, trans. R. J. Schork, with modifications)

49 Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ τῷ κατὰξιώσαντί με τοιοῦτον ἔργον ἀποτελέσαι· ἐνίκησά σε, Σολομών: *Narratio de S. Sophia*, ed. T. Preger, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* (Leipzig, 1901), 1:105.

50 I am grateful to the anonymous reader who drew my attention to these texts.

51 H. 54.3–5, 8–10, nov. 77 (381.21), nov. 141 (703.25ff., 704.1ff., 13ff.).

52 H. 54 refrain and stanza 3, nov. 141 (703.29).

53 H. 54.tit., 13f., 25, nov. 77 (382.25), nov. 141 (704.5ff.).

54 H. 54.pro., 10, 15, 18, 20, 23–25, nov. 77 (382.11, 37), nov. 141 (703.28, 704.12ff., cf. 704.5ff.).

55 See M. Meier, "Kaiserherrschaft und 'Volksfrömmigkeit' im Konstantinopel des 6. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.: Die Verlegung der Hypapante durch Justinian im Jahr 542," *Historia* 51 (2002): 89–111, esp. 104f., and idem, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians* (n. 26 above), 570–86.



Make their devout kingdom joyful,  
only Lover of mankind! <sup>56</sup>

and:

Give peace to your commonwealth in times of war,  
and strengthen its emperors, whose friend you are,  
only Lover of mankind! <sup>57</sup>

We observe that in this hymn the references to the emperors are to be found only in the second and third prooimion. The plausible explanation is that Romanos wrote the hymn (including the first prooimion) originally independently of an imperial order and that he felt that the content of the *oikoi* of the hymn allowed no insertion of this kind.

The next example is the hymn “On the Mission of the Apostles,” probably to be dated in 547;<sup>58</sup> in this text *oikoi* 5–6 emphasize the leading role of the apostle Peter and may be interpreted as support of Justinian’s policy in favor of the Roman pope, whose role as the leader of the apostles and of the “flock” is emphasized and narrowed down at the same time:

So, go forth to all nations,  
sowing the seed of repentance on the earth  
and watering it with doctrinal teachings;  
Peter, look to me as to how you educate;  
Remembering your own fall, sympathize with all;  
Mindful of the maiden who caused your fall, do  
not be harsh;

56 τὸ κέρας ἀνύψωσον τῶν πιστῶν βασιλέων ἡμῶν·  
τούτους κράτυνον ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου, Λόγε,  
τούτων εὐφρανὼν τὴν εὐσεβῆ βασιλείαν,  
ὁ μόνος φιλόανθρωπος.

(Romanos, H. 14.pr2, trans. E. Lash [n. 1 above], with modifications)  
The “horn” (*keras*) is a symbol of pious might and glory in the Old Testament; cf. Psalm 148:14 et passim.

57 ἀλλ’ εἰρήνευσον ἐν πολέμοις τὸ πολίτευμα  
καὶ κραταίωσον βασιλείας οὓς ἡγάπησας,  
ὁ μόνος φιλόανθρωπος.

(Romanos, H. 14.pr3, trans. E. Lash, with modifications)

If we wish to give actuality to the allusion “give peace . . . in times of war” (prooimion 3), we can relate it to the war begun in 540 against the Persians or to that begun in 536 against the Goths.

58 Probably after 536; see Grosdidier de Matons (n. 1 above), 5:72–75, against E. Topping, “The Apostle Peter, Justinian and Romanos the Melodos,” *BMGs* 2 (1976): 1–15.

If conceit attacks you, hear the sound of the  
cock’s crow,  
And remember the tears with whose streams  
I washed you,  
I who alone know what is in the heart.

Peter, do you love me? Do what I say;  
Feed my flock, and love those whom I love,  
Sympathizing with sinners.  
Heed my mercy to you,  
since I received you who had thrice denied me.  
You have a thief as gatekeeper of Paradise to give  
you courage.  
Send him those whom you wish. Because of you,  
Adam turned to me  
Saying: “O Creator grant to me the robber as  
gatekeeper, and Cephas as keeper of keys,  
Thou who alone know what is in the heart.”<sup>59</sup>

Another testimony is the hymn “On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary,” dated before 548, with a final prayer for the emperors<sup>60</sup> and their flock:

O exalted God, Creator of all, Thou who didst create  
the universe at a word,

59 Ἄπιτε οὖν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη·  
μετανοίας τὸν σπόνρον ἐμβαλόντες τῇ γῇ  
διδασκαλίαις ἀρδεύσατε.  
Βλέπε μοι, Πέτρε, πῶς ἐκπαιδεύεις·  
ἐννοῶν σου τὸ πταῖσμα συμπάθει πᾶσι  
μὴ αὐστηρός, δι’ ἐκείνην τὴν κόρην τὴν σείσασάν σε·  
ἐάν σοι τύφος εἰσπέσῃ, τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ ἀλέκτορος ἀκουσον  
καὶ τῶν δακρύων μνημόνευε ὡς ἐγὼ σε τοῖς ρείθροις ἀπέπλυνα  
ὁ μόνος γινώσκων τὰ ἐγκάρδια.

Πέτρε, φίλεις με; Ποίει ἃ λέγω·  
ποίμαινέ μου τὴν ποίμνην καὶ φίλει οὓς φιλῶ,  
συμπάσχων τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν  
μνησθεῖς μου τῆς πρὸς σὲ εὐσπλαγχνίας,  
ὅτι τρίς ἀρνησάμενόν σε ἐδεξάμην·  
ἔχεις ληστὴν θυρωρὸν παραδείσου θαρρύνοντά σε,  
ἐκείνῳ πέμπε οὓς θέλεις· δι’ ὑμῶν πρὸς ἐμὲ ἀναστρέφει Ἀδὰμ  
βοῶν· Ὁ πλάστης παρέσχε μοι τὸν ληστὴν πυλωρὸν καὶ  
κλειδοῦχον Κηφᾶν,  
ὁ μόνος γινώσκων τὰ ἐγκάρδια.

(Romanos, H. 47.5–6, trans. M. Carpenter [n. 1 above], with modifications)

60 The plural “emperors” may be understood as an indication that the hymn was written before the death of the empress in 548. See Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos* (n. 40 above), 243–45, and Koder, *Die Hymnen* (n. 1 above), 1:371.

And Thou who didst equip man with Thy wisdom,  
As the only lover of man, grant as Merciful One Thy  
peace to Thy people,  
Guard the faithful rulers, along with the shepherd!  
Watch over and keep steady the flock, also,  
In order that everyone may cry out:  
“The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of  
God, and the nurse of our life.”<sup>61</sup>

The next example is the second hymn “On Lazarus,” in a version that may be dated after the death of the empress Theodora († 548).<sup>62</sup> Here, rather unexpectedly, a short prayer for the victory of the emperor is inserted: *Decorate the emperor with victories!*<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the fourth hymn “On the Resurrection,” though it has no explicit mention of the emperor, is in its theological definitions so close to Justinian’s *ὁμολογία πίστεως κατὰ τῶν τριῶν κεφαλαίων* from 551,<sup>64</sup> and to the *troparion* Ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός, which was ascribed to the emperor,<sup>65</sup> that an imperial order is

very probable. The final prayer also points in this direction:<sup>66</sup>

We who are stamped with the seal of Thy wood,  
O Master,  
exalt Thy Incarnation for the sake of men,  
We know Thee both as mortal and immortal,  
as God and man, one Son;  
For even if Thou didst suffer in the flesh in  
Thy plan of salvation,  
Thou dost still remain indivisible in the Trinity.  
Strengthen Thy church, O Savior, in this faith;  
As the only Merciful One, confirm and save  
Thy people,  
In order that we may all kneel in obeisance to  
Thy Resurrection;  
For Thou dost dispense to all light, life, and  
knowledge,  
Thou who hast destroyed the weapons of Belial,  
the victory of Hades,  
and the sting of Death.<sup>67</sup>

61 Ὑψιστε θεέ, ὁ πάντων πλαστοουργός, ὁ τῷ λόγῳ ποιήσας τὰ  
σύμπαντα  
καὶ σὴ σοφία σκευάσας τὸν ἄνθρωπον,  
αὐτὸς ὡς μόνος φιλόανθρωπος τὴν σὴν εἰρήνην σφάλαῳ ὡς  
οἰκτίρμων παράσχου,  
φυλάττων βασιλεῖς πιστοῦς, σὺν τῷ ποιμένι  
ἀτάραχον τὴν ποίμνην φρουρῶν καὶ σκέπων,  
ἵνα πᾶς τις βοᾷ.  
Ἦ στείρα τίκτει τὴν θεοτόκον καὶ τροφὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν.  
(Romanos [Maas/Trypanis], H. 35.11, trans. M. Carpenter, with modifications)

62 See Koder, *Die Hymnen*, 1:431–33.

63 κατακόσμησον νίκαις τὸν βασιλέα: Romanos, H. 27app.7.

64 Cf. E. Schwartz, “Drei dogmatische Schriften Justinians,” in *Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Abteilung* 18 (Munich, 1939), 72–111, and Uthemann, “Kaiser Justinian” (n. 2.4 above), 60ff.

65 Ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς καὶ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ,  
ἀθάνατος ὑπάρχων,  
καὶ καταδεξάμενος διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν  
σαρκωθῆναι ἐκ τῆς ἁγίας θεοτόκου  
καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας, (5)  
ἀτρέπτως ἐνανθρωπήσας, σταυρωθεὶς τε, Χριστὲ ὁ θεός,  
θανάτῳ θάνατον πατήσας,  
εἰς ὧν τῆς ἁγίας τριάδος,  
συνδοξαζόμενος τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι,  
σῶσον ἡμᾶς. (10)

For bibliography see n. 2.4 above. The proximity becomes clearer if one compares terms or passages in the following verses of Justinian’s *troparion* and in Romanos’s *kontakion* 43, in each case in their semantic context:

line 1 Romanos 43.3.4: εἰς μονογενὴς ὑπὸ πάντων δηλούμενος  
line 2 Romanos 43.13.7: ἀλλὰ Θεὸς ἐπεγνώσθη φύσει ἀθάνατος  
μένων  
line 4 Romanos 43.1.6: ἐκ παρθένου ἀφθόρου σαρκωθείς  
line 6 Romanos 43.2.9 εἰ καὶ τὸ κατὰ σάρκα σταυρωθῆναι  
κατεδέξω  
Romanos 43.4.8 σωματικῶς σταυρωθέντα τὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ  
Πατρός Λόγον  
Romanos 43.18.9 . . . διὰ τὴν σάρκα ἣν ἀνέλαβεν ἀτρέπτως  
Romanos 43.25.9 δι’ ὑμᾶς γὰρ ἐφάνην ἐπὶ γῆς ἐνανθρωπήσας  
Romanos 43.33.2 τὴν σὴν δι’ ἀνθρώπους ἐνανθρώπησιν  
line 7 Romanos 43.26.3 . . . καὶ σύ, Θάνατε, ἅμα πεπάτησαι . . .  
line 8 Romanos 43.2.8 ἀμερὴς ἐν τριάδι  
Romanos 43.33.5 ὅμως ἀμερὴς μένεις αἰὲν ἐν τριάδι  
line 10 Romanos 43.33.7 τὸν δὲ λαόν σου στηρίξας σῶσον . . .  
66 Grosdidier de Matons (n. 1 above), 4:493–96.  
67 Σφρα]γισθέντες τῷ ξύλῳ σου, δέσποτα, μεγαλύνομεν  
τὴν σὴν δι’ ἀνθρώπους ἐνανθρώπησιν,  
ἀθανή καὶ θνη[τόν σε] γινώσκοντες ὡς Θεὸν καὶ βροτόν, ἕνα υἱόν.  
εἰ γὰρ [καὶ] παθεῖν σαρκικῶς ὥκονόμησας,  
ὅμως ἀμερὴς μέ[νει]ς αἰὲν ἐν τριάδι.  
ἀλλ’ ἐν πίστει τοιαύτη, Σωτήρ, τὴν σὴν ἐκ[κλησίαν] κραταίωσον,  
τὸν δὲ λαόν σου στηρίξας σῶσον [ὡς] μόνος οἰκτίρμων,  
ἵνα τῇ σῇ ἀναστάσει πάντες ἡμεῖς προσκυνούμεν.  
σύ γὰρ πᾶσι παρέχεις φωτισμόν, ζωὴν καὶ γνώσιν,  
ὁ λύσας τοῦ Βελίαρ τὰ βέλη, τοῦ Αἰδου τὸ νίκος  
καὶ Θανάτου τὸ κέντρον.  
(Romanos, H. 43.33, trans. M. Carpenter [n. 1 above], with modifications)

On the other hand, some of Romanos's hymns also combine praise of the emperor with a position (slightly) critical of certain steps that Justinian took not only against political rivals but also against heretics, pagans, and infidels. I agree with Luigi Silvano<sup>68</sup> that Romanos's silence regarding the political events of the year 532 in the hymn "On Earthquakes and Conflagration" may well be interpreted as indicating that he was a critic of the bloody suppression of the Nika riot.

A good example of Romanos's possibly critical position against the religious policy of the emperor is the kontakion "On the New Converts," in which Romanos expresses a partial sympathy for converts who were compelled to accept baptism, perhaps a group of noble pagans who suffered this in the year 546;<sup>69</sup> for example, he addresses one of them:

But many times in fear of the laws which are  
in force now,  
you came to the baptismal font, and you became  
what you became,  
in fear of the spirit of the age.  
And what will happen to you when the time  
of the Last Judgment arrives, when everything  
will be brought to trial  
and our resurrection will bring retribution to all?  
Glory to You, glory to You because You have  
consented.<sup>70</sup>

Advise yourself, friend, in these things!  
You approached in fear, so stay in desire.  
Love what you received and keep what you possess.  
Do not backslide to earlier behavior. . . .<sup>71</sup>

68 L. Silvano, "Echi di propaganda" (n. 26 above), 115, 117–19.

69 See Grosdidier de Matons, 5:331. For Justinian's activities in church matters in general, see Uthemann, "Kaiser Justinian" (n. 24 above), 5–83, and especially on his policy against pagans, F. R. Trombley, "Religious Transition in Sixth-Century Syria," *ByzF* 20 (1994): 153–95, esp. 167–82.

70 Πολλάκις δὲ καὶ φόβῳ τῶν νῦν κρατούντων νόμων  
προσῆλθες τῷ βαπτίσματι καὶ γέγονας ὁ γέγονας  
τὸν καιρὸν αἰσχυρόμενος·  
καὶ τί σοι γένηται, ὅταν ἐλεύσεται  
ὁ καιρὸς τῆς κρίσεως καὶ πάντα ἐλέγχεται  
καὶ τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀναποδώσει ἢ ἀνάστασις ἡμῶν; –  
Δόξα σοι, δόξα σοι, ὅτι οὕτως ἠυδόκησας.  
(Romanos, H. 52.14, trans. M. Carpenter, with modifications)

71 Νουθέτει, ὦ φίλε, σαυτὸν ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις,  
κἂν φόβῳ προσῆλθες, λοιπὸν ἐπίμεινον πόθῳ.

In spite of such particular cases I think that the preceding examples demonstrate that the hymns of Romanos—beyond their essential purpose—could be used (perhaps also misused) to influence the masses, and I think that Justinian was aware of this fact and exploited it.<sup>72</sup>

## Rhythm and Melody Supporting Mass Propaganda

If we accept the possibility that some of the genuine kontakia of Romanos contain elements of imperial propaganda—both ideological and political—then one must necessarily ask whether or not elements—apart from the general linguistic and stylistic level—can be found in the hymns that substantiate the notion of an immediate influence on the faithful masses.

First of all, the combination and the synergetic effect of melody and rhythm in ecclesiastic psalmody should be emphasized. Both rhythm and melody aid human memory. The emperors could feel these effects not only in the church but also in the palace and the hippodrome. This, as well as the close relationship between imperial and ecclesiastical ceremonial, ensues from Constantine Porphyrogenitus's *De ceremoniis*, not only for the period of the "Macedonian" dynasty, but also (from the chapters which are ascribed to Petros Patrikios) for the fifth and sixth centuries, especially in the extremely rhythmical acclamations that preceded and the *laudes* that followed the coronations of the emperors Leo I,<sup>73</sup> Anastasios,<sup>74</sup> and Justin I.<sup>75</sup>

ἀγάπησον ἃ ἔλαβες καὶ σφίγξον ἃ κατέχεις·  
μὴ αὐτομολήσης πρὸς τὰ πρότερα.

(Romanos, H. 52.15, trans. M. Carpenter, with modifications)

72 As he did also on the occasion of the second dedication of Hagia Sophia in 562, after the partial damage of the church by an earthquake; see the anonymous hymn "On the Inauguration of St. Sophia," ed. C. A. Trypanis, in *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica* (Vienna, 1968), 141–47.

73 Examples: (ἤρξαντο πάντες κράζειν οὕτως) "εἰσάκουσον, ὁ Θεὸς, σὲ παρακαλοῦμεν. ἐπάκουσον, ὁ Θεός. Λέοντι ζῶή, εἰσάκουσον, ὁ Θεός. Λέων βασιλεύσει. Θεὲ φιλόανθρωπε, Λέοντα βασιλέα τὸ πρᾶγμα τὸ δημόσιον αἰτεῖ· ὁ στρατὸς Λέοντα βασιλέα αἰτεῖ. Λέοντα οἱ νόμοι ἐκδέχονται. Λέοντα τὸ παλάτιον ἐκδέχεται· αὐταὶ εὐχαὶ τοῦ παλατίου· αὐταὶ ἐντεῦξες τοῦ στρατοπέδου· αὐταὶ εὐχαὶ τῆς συγκλήτου· αὐταὶ εὐχαὶ τοῦ λαοῦ. Λέοντα ὁ κόσμος ἀναμένει. Λέοντα ὁ στρατὸς ἐκδέχεται· τὸ κοινὸν καλὸν, Λέων,

Furthermore, in a detailed chapter on the “Reception in the great *Triklinos* of the Magnaura where the *despotai* are seated on the throne of Solomon” *De ceremoniis* also includes instructions for the choirs of the churches of the Holy Apostles, the *apostolitai*, and Hagia Sophia, the *hagiosophitai*.<sup>76</sup> It thus becomes obvious that even in the early Macedonian period, choirs from the palace churches participated in the festal ceremonies at the imperial court; hence, the musical performances in the church and those in the palace did not differ substantially from each other.

The musical component in the kontakia was extremely important, but we do not have sufficient information to reconstruct the ecclesiastical chant in the period before the reorganization of church music that is connected with the name of John of Damascus.<sup>77</sup> We should, however,

ἐλθέτω· τὸ κοινὸν ἀγαθὸν, Λέων, βασιλεύσει· εἰσάκουσον, ὁ Θεὸς, σὲ παρακαλοῦμεν. . . . Λέων αὐγουστε, σὺ νικᾷς, σὺ εὐσεβῆς, σὺ σεβαστός· ὁ Θεὸς σε ἔδωκεν, ὁ Θεὸς σε φυλάξει· τὸν Χριστὸν σεβόμενος αἰνικᾷς πολλοὺς χρόνους Λέων βασιλεύσει· χριστιανὸν βασιλεῖον ὁ Θεὸς περιφρουρήσει. . . . καὶ δυνατὸς καὶ νικητὴς καὶ σεβαστός, εὐτυχῶς, εὐτυχῶς· πολλοὺς χρόνους, Λέων αὐγουστε . . . καὶ εὐσεβῆς καὶ δυνατὸς καὶ λογιώτατος. . . .” (*De cerim.*, ch. 91, 1:410–12).

74 Examples: (πάντες ἐκραζαν·) “Ἀριάδνη αὐγούστα, σὺ νικᾷς· εὐσεβῆ Κύριε, ζῶν αὐτῇ·” καὶ πολλάκις τὸ “Κύριε, ἐλέησον” εἶπον, “πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη τῆς αὐγούστης· ὀρθόδοξον βασιλεία τῇ οἰκουμένῃ. . . ἡμεῖς δοῦλοι τῆς αὐγούστης· εὐσεβῆ Κύριε, ζῶν αὐτῇ· πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη τῆς αὐγούστης· Ἀριάδνη αὐγούστα, σὺ νικᾷς· Ῥωμαίων βασιλεία τῇ οἰκουμένῃ” (*De cerim.*, ch. 92, 1:418f.). . . . Κύριε, ἐλέησον· υἱὲ Θεοῦ, σὺ αὐτὸν ἐλέησον· Ἀναστάσιε αὐγουστε, τούμβηκας· εὐσεβῆ βασιλεία ὁ Θεὸς φυλάξει· ὁ Θεὸς σε ἔδωκεν, ὁ Θεὸς σε φυλάξει. . . ἄξιε τῆς βασιλείας, ἄξιε τῆς τριάδος, ἄξιε τῆς πόλεως· τοὺς δηλώτορας ἔξω βάλε (ibid., 1:424–25).

75 Examples: “Ἰουστίνε αὐγουστε, σὺ νικᾷς” (παρὰ πάντων ἐβοήθη·) “ἄφθονα τῇ οἰκουμένῃ· ὡς ἐξῆσας, οὕτω βασιλευσον· ἄφθονα τῇ πολιτείᾳ· βασιλεὺ οὐράνιε, σῶσον τὸν ἐπίγειον· Ἰουστίνε αὐγουστε, σὺ νικᾷς τοῦ νέου Κωνσταντίνου πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη· ἡμεῖς δοῦλοι τοῦ βασιλέως . . . υἱὲ Θεοῦ, σὺ αὐτὸν ἐλέησον· σὺ αὐτὸν ἐπέλεξω· σὺ αὐτὸν ἐλέησον· Ἰουστίνε αὐγουστε, σὺ νικᾷς . . . ἄξιε τῆς βασιλείας, ἄξιε τῆς τριάδος, ἄξιε τῆς πόλεως· πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη τοῦ βασιλέως· ἀγνοὺς ἄρχοντας τῇ οἰκουμένῃ. . . .” (*De cerim.*, ch. 93, 1:429f.).

76 *De cerim.* 2.15, p. 585, the relevant passage: “the *apostolitai* cantors took up their position inside (= behind?) the *velum*, in the arcade that (looks) to the imperial bed-chamber (and) the *hagiosophitai* took up their positions inside (= behind?) the *velum* in the arcade that (looks) to the *pantheon* (and) they sing *basilikia* throughout the reception” (ἔστησαν οἱ ψάλται ἀποστολῖται ἔσωθεν τοῦ βήλου εἰς τὴν καμάραν τὴν πρὸς τὸν βασιλικὸν κοιτῶνα· οἱ δὲ ἀγιοσοφῖται ἔστησαν ἔσωθεν τοῦ βήλου ἐν τῇ καμάρᾳ τῇ πρὸς τὸ πᾶνθεον, δι’ ὅλου τοῦ κλητωρίου ἄδοντες βασιλικά), see also ibid., pp. 577, 583, and 597.

77 For the state of discussion on the development of ecclesiastical chant before the eighth century, see S. P. Brock, “Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origin,” in *Papers Presented to the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies*, vol. 2, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Berlin, 1985), 77–81, and M. Haas, “Modus als Skala—Modus als Modellmelodie: Ein

always keep in mind the factor of music when speaking about the presentation of the kontakia in the church. Following Egon Wellesz, “the intimate relation between words and music has been recognized” and therefore we should not consider “the poems apart from the melodies, nor the music apart from the texts.”<sup>78</sup> Though we have practically no knowledge about the melodies of Romanos’s hymns, three observations can be made:

1. The endings of the refrains are dominated rhythmically by the *antepenultima*. This fact probably was combined with a rise of the melody at the last accentuated syllable by a third compared with the following note, as demonstrated by Egon Wellesz for later melodies.<sup>79</sup> This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that a listener follows the contents of a text not word by word but in logical syntactical units. Consequently, the text is understood and adopted more easily in the subconscious if the last accent of a unit appears early.

2. From the eight modes, as they were known and used in his time, Romanos preferred by far (more than 50%) the fourth plagal and the second plagal to the other modes.<sup>80</sup> The probable explanation for this preference is that these two modes corresponded best to the taste of the audience and to the vocal register of cantors and choirs.

3. From the approximately sixty kontakia whose texts are accepted as having been genuinely authored by Romanos, only nineteen are *idiomela* (the melody being an original composition of Romanos). All the others are *prosomoia* (Romanos used a melody, already known, from another kontakion, normally a melody of his own composition).<sup>81</sup> This usage hints at preferences of the audience and of the singers<sup>82</sup> for certain melodies, rhythms,

Problem musikalischer Überlieferung in der Zeit vor den ersten notierten Quellen,” in *Palaeobyzantine Notations: A Reconsideration of the Source Material*, ed. J. Raasted and C. Troelsgård (Hernen, 1995), 11–32.

78 Wellesz, *History of Byzantine Music* (n. 15 above), 360.

79 Ibid., 426f. (Tables of Formulae of Hirmi).

80 Distribution of use of modes within the “genuine” kontakia of Romanos: fourth plagal 16, second plagal 15, first 9, fourth 8, second 5, third plagal 3, first plagal 3, and third 1 time.

81 The kontakion (54) “On Earthquakes and Conflagration,” for example, is not *idiomelon* but *prosomoion*, from the hymn (16) “On the holy Theophany.” The prooimion corresponds to Ἐπεφάνης σήμερον and the stanzas to Τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ τῶν ἐθνῶν of this famous hymn, and both melodies obviously were well known. The same is valid for H. 31 “On the Ten Virgins” and altogether for some 150 other kontakia.

82 Though Romanos himself does not mention other singers (*melodoi*) or choirleaders in his hymns, but only speaks about himself as singer (see

and meters familiar to them, not only for emotional or aesthetical reasons, but also because these well-known melodies supported or facilitated the performance as much as the understanding of the content.<sup>83</sup>

In my opinion, these three observations strengthen the impression that the melodos was in close contact with cantors and choirs and that he would take into consideration the taste of the (faithful) audiences.

### Activation of Audience: Direct Speech

It is a commonplace that in the preindustrial period (and consequently during Romanos's time) human memory had a greater receptivity than it does today, because the influence of visual and acoustic impressions in everyday life was significantly less than it is now;<sup>84</sup> in particular, acoustical encoding was better developed. There were no continuously strong external stimuli, such as there are today, and people were able to remember and recite even long portions of metrically or rhythmically structured texts—for example the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or oral poetry in Bosnia, as Milman Parry has demonstrated.<sup>85</sup> But on the other hand, the monotony of oral communication that lasts more than a certain span of time (perhaps half an hour?) often causes a decline in audience concentration. This is true for talks and lectures, but also for sermons and kontakia in the church. With regard to the hymns, the factors that I just mentioned, namely rhythm and melody, may even enhance this fatigue, especially during an all-night vigil (*pannychis*). What are the possible antidotes?

One is to integrate the audience more actively into the divine service, especially in the night liturgy, by a

livelier arrangement of the performance. Romanos did this especially through the stylistic instruments of direct speech, including the *enthymema*<sup>86</sup> and the dialogue. Direct speech is to be found in nearly every hymn, and it supports the plasticity and liveliness of his presentation. As the role of dialogue in the kontakion is well known, it may suffice to give just one example, the hymn “On Peter’s Denial” (to be sung on Maundy Thursday). Romanos addresses his public from the beginning of this kontakion with these words:

Let us, if you will, all go with Peter  
to Kaiaphas’s courtyard with Christ.  
Let us cry out to him Peter’s word of old:  
“Even should you ascend the cross, and even if you  
descend into the tomb,  
with you we suffer and will die and cry out:  
Hasten, Holy One, save your flock!”<sup>87</sup>

In the following stanzas, Romanos sketches the psychological background of Peter’s denial in broad outline and continues with an exhortation to the audience to listen carefully to the words of the Bible:

You then, lovers of Christ, having heard Peter, lend  
me your ears,  
listen to the demands of the Gospel and pay attention  
to them.  
For Matthew tells, in the book that he wrote,  
how after the supper Christ said:

86 The word ἐνθύμημα in the sense of an inner reflection or monologue is used by Romanos in the following hymns: “On Jacob and Esau” (4.18.9), “On the Woman of Samaria” (19.15.4), “On the Raising of Lazarus I” (26.4.2), “On the Beheading of John the Baptist” (M38.7.2), “On the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia I” (M57.13.3); see H. Hunger, “Das ‘Enthymem’ in der liturgischen Dichtung des frühen Byzanz,” in *Topik und Rhetorik*, ed. T. Schirren and G. Ueding (Tübingen, 2000), 93–101.

87 Τὸν νοῦν ἀνυψώσωμεν, τὴν φρένα ὑπάψωμεν, τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέσωμεν,  
τῇ ψυχῇ διαναστώμεν καὶ σπουδάσωμεν σχεδὸν συμπαθεῖν τῷ ἀπαθεί.  
ἀφήσωμεν πάντα λογισμὸν πολυμέριμον  
καὶ προσκολληθώμεν τῷ ἐν σταυρῷ.  
ἄγωμεν πάντες, εἰ δοκεῖ, ἅμα τῷ Πέτρῳ  
εἰς τὴν Καϊάφα αὐλὴν σὺν αὐτῷ.  
Βοήσωμεν Χριστῷ τὰς τοῦ Πέτρου πάλαι φωνάς.  
Κὰν ἐν ξύλῳ ἀνέρχη, κὰν ἐν τάφῳ κατέρχη,  
μετὰ σοῦ πάσχομεν καὶ θνήσκομεν καὶ κράζομεν.  
Σπεῦσον, σῶσον, ἅγιε, τὴν ποίμνην σου.  
(Romanos, H. 34.1, trans. E. Lash [n. 1 above], with modifications)

the examples and bibliography at the beginning of this paper), it is tacitly accepted that he intended at the time of the creation of his hymns (or most of them) a recitation not only by himself but also by other people and in other churches.

83 See the remarks of Wellesz, *History of Byzantine Music*, 361f.

84 On memory in general see H. J. Markowitsch, ed., *Information Processing by the Brain: Views and Hypotheses from a Physiological-cognitive Perspective* (Toronto, 1988), and idem, *Intellectual Functions and the Brain: An Historical Perspective* (Toronto, 1992).

85 See A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, ed. S. Mitchell and G. Nagy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA, 2000), chap. 2 (13–29): “Singers: Performance and Training,” esp. 21–23 and 26–28.

“My children, dear disciples, this night  
you will all deny me and flee from me.”  
And when they all shouted together in amazement,  
Peter cried out:  
“Even if all deny you, I will not deny you. . . .”<sup>88</sup>

The direct speech quoted here illustrates why some authors in the past stressed the “dramatic character” of Romanos’s hymns.<sup>89</sup> They spoke also about “religious theater” and even considered the possibility of scenic performances. But in spite of the lively and extended dialogues in many of his kontakia,<sup>90</sup> I find it impossible to accept this hypothesis.<sup>91</sup> The idea of theatrical performances is not at all supported by the Byzantine sources, and, moreover, is in sharp contradiction to the position of the Church Fathers and the laws and canons.<sup>92</sup>

88 Ὑμεῖς οὖν, φιλόχριστοι, τοῦ Πέτρου ἀκούσαντες τὰ ὠτά μοι  
κλίνατε  
καὶ τοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ὑπακούσατε ῥητοῖς καὶ αὐτοῖς δότε τὸν  
νοῦν.  
Φησὶ γὰρ Ματθαῖος ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ ἣν ἔγραψε·  
Μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι εἶπε Χριστός·  
Τέκνα μου, φίλοι μαθηταί, τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ  
ἀρνεῖσθέ με πάντες καὶ φεύγετέ με.  
Καὶ πάντων ὁμαδὸν ἐκπληγέντων, Πέτρος βοᾷ·  
Εἰ καὶ πάντες ἀρνοῦνται, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀρνοῦμαι·  
μετὰ σοῦ ἔσομαι καὶ θνήσκειν καὶ κρᾶξω σοι.  
Σπεῦσον, σῶσον, ἅγιε, τὴν ποίμνην σου.

(Romanos, H. 34.3, trans. E. Lash)

Remarkable change from direct to indirect speech!

89 See especially G. La Piana, “The Byzantine Theatre,” *Speculum* 11 (1936): 174–81; M. Carpenter, “Romanos and the Mystery Play of the East,” *University of Missouri Studies* 11, no. 3 (1936): 21–51; S. Baud-Bovy, “Sur un ‘Sacrifice d’ Abraham’ de Romanos et sur l’existence d’un théâtre religieux à Byzance,” *Byzantion* 13 (1938): 321–34; and Z. Tsantsaridou, “Ο ὕμνος του Ρωμανού για τη θυσία του Αβραάμ και το ομόθυμο έργο του Κρητικού θεάτρου,” *Amalthia* 15 (1984): 143–58. See also E. V. Maltese, “Sulle tracce dello ‘spettacolo sacro’ a Bisanzio,” in *Da Bisanzio a San Marco, musica e liturgia*, ed. G. Cattin (Bologna, 1997), 33–41; W. Puchner, *Studien zum Kulturkontext der liturgischen Szene: Lazarus und Judas als religiöse Volksfiguren in Bild und Brauch, Lied und Legende Südosteuropas* (Vienna, 1991); and idem, *Η Κύπρος των σταυροφόρων και το δραστηριοτικό θέατρο του μεσαίωνα* (Nicosia, 2004).

90 Other examples: H. 10 “On the Nativity”: dialogue between the Virgin Mary and the Magi; H. 15 “On the Innocents”: dialogue of King Herod with his soldiers; H. 3 “On the Sacrifice of Abraham”: dialogue of Abraham with Sarah and Isaac; and H. 46 “On the Apostle Thomas”: dialogue between Christ and the apostle.

91 Though, of course, I fully accept that “verbal celebration had always been an important part of the ritual interface between lordship and service,” and in this sense any “performance of a text to an audience” can be named “theatre”; cf. P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 336.

92 See, e.g., *Constitutiones Apostolorum* 2.61–62 and 8.32, ed. P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique* (Grottaferrata, 1962), 1.2:1–53; can. 51 of

## Activation of Audience: The Refrains

Another important instrument to encourage the concentration of the faithful on the liturgical texts is to animate them to participate in the ecclesiastical hymnody. This practice was not an invention of the age of the kontakion, but originates (for the Christian churches) in the early Christian period. As early as the end of the fourth century, Egeria repeatedly emphasizes psalmody and antiphony when she describes the liturgies in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land;<sup>93</sup> similar observations for the church of Alexandria are to be found in early monastic texts such as the *Apophthegmata patrum*<sup>94</sup> and the *Historia Lausiaca*.<sup>95</sup>

Romanos offers to the faithful the possibility of participating in the hymnody by singing the refrain.<sup>96</sup> In the kontakion, the refrain appears, as is known, for the first time at the end of the prooimion (or prooimia) and is repeated at the end of every stanza. It is the formal element that connects prooimia and stanzas. In the dialogue between the cantor and the faithful as a whole (or the choir of chanters), the refrain had, with regard to the contents, the function of a confirming response to the latter. José Grosdidier de Matons demonstrated this with reference to the hymn “On Judas” with its extremely short prooimion consisting of only one line and the refrain:<sup>97</sup>

the Council in Trullo, ed. P. Joannou, *Les canons des conciles oecuméniques* (Rome, 1962), 98–241, and *Basilica*, ed. H. J. Scheltema, N. van der Wal, and D. Holwerda (Groningen, 1953–88), 21.1.13.4–5.

93 Chapters 24–49 (Egeria, *Journal de Voyage* [n. 5 above], 188–266) refer to the liturgies, with frequent quotations of psalms, hymns, and antiphons; see for example chap. 27 (ibid. 212): *Tota autem nocte vicibus dicuntur psalmi responsorii, vicibus antiphonae, vicibus lectiones diversae*. . . . ; chap. 43 (ibid. 250): *Et iam inde descenditur cum ymnis omnis populus usque ad unum toti cum episcopo ymnos dicentes vel antiphonas aptas diei ipsi*. . . . ; chap. 47 (ibid. 262): *Illud autem hic ante omnia valde gratum fit et valde admirabile, ut semper tam ymni quam antiphonae et lectiones nec non etiam et orationes, quas dicet episcopus, tales pronuntiationes habeant, ut et diei, qui celebratur, et loco, in quo agitur, aptae et convenientes sint semper*.

94 See W. Christ and M. Paranikas, *Anthologia graeca carminum christianorum* (Leipzig, 1871), XXIXf.

95 Palladios, *Historia Lausiaca*, PG 34:1020; similar also are Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 107, PG 32:372, and *Letter* 2.2, *Saint Basile, Lettres*, ed. Y. Courtonne (Paris, 1957), 1:7f.; see Koder, *Die Hymnen* (n. 1 above), 1:15f.

96 See J. Koder, “Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum: Zur Einbeziehung und Beeinflussung der Zuhörer durch das Kontakion,” *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 134, no. 1 (Vienna, 1999): 63–94.

97 J. Grosdidier de Matons (n. 1 above), 40.

Heavenly Father, full of tender affection and love for mankind,

(followed by the refrain:)

Be merciful, merciful, merciful to us,  
you who are patient with all, and wait for all.<sup>98</sup>

One should add here that it is not only contemporary Byzantinists who stress the great importance of the refrain in the liturgical hymns; the Byzantines themselves did so as well. The Souda lexicon, for example, offers under the entry “ἀνακλώμενον” the following explanation: τὸ ἀπηχούμενον, ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ κυροῦ Ῥωμανοῦ, quoting the refrain: τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀπρόσιτον (*the unapproachable light*).<sup>99</sup>

Something should be said here about the metrics in the rhythmical structure of the refrains: The aforementioned refrain, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀπρόσιτον, like eighteen others in the hymns of Romanos, ends with an eight-syllable *kolon* with an antepenultimate accent, which is in fact for him a typical refrain rhythm.<sup>100</sup> Only the antepenultimate seven-syllable ending—used for fifteen refrains—has almost the same frequency; one such, taken from the hymn “On the Presentation in the Temple,” is: . . . ὁ μόνος φίλάνθρωπος (*You, the only friend of man*).<sup>101</sup>

More than half (53.2 percent) of the refrains end in seven syllables (32.8 percent) or eight syllables (20.4 percent), an observation to be connected with the fact that nearly half of the endings have an antepenultimate accent (46.4 percent). Furthermore, a significant number of refrains end with an antepenultimate five-syllable unit (8 percent), for example in the hymn “On the Five Loaves”: . . . ἄρτος ἀφθαρσίας ἐπουράνιος (. . . *the heavenly bread of incorruption*).<sup>102</sup>

The antepenultimate endings in other meters are less significant. In general one may observe that in all of

Romanos’s metrical patterns the tendency toward *two* metrical/musical accents for each *kolon*, independent of the number of word accents, is very strong.<sup>103</sup>

An important factor for the activation of the audience is the dialogue, which, as already demonstrated on the basis of the hymn “On Judas” (H. 33), in the rather short refrains often has the mode of direct speech. Even Christ himself can speak to his apostles (and indirectly to all mankind):

I am not parting from you, I am with you and  
no one is against you.<sup>104</sup>

Prayers and appeals to all the faithful dominate in the refrains; sometimes a combination of both is found. The lengths of these refrains can differ significantly. A short example is *Savior, save me!*<sup>105</sup> A longer one is: *Save all from your anger, through your love for us, Redeemer of all!*<sup>106</sup> A good example of both direct speech on two levels and the combination of appeal and prayer is found in the refrain of one of his many hymns on “On the Nativity”: *People, let us say: Be blessed, New-born, be praised, our God.*<sup>107</sup>

Generally speaking, the prayers are exclusively directed to God. The two exceptions (“On the Annunciation,” H. 9): *Hail, bride unwedded!* (Χαῖρε, νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε) and (“On the Nativity,” H. 11): *Favored one!* (ἡ κεχαριτωμένη) are clearly modeled on the Akathistos Hymn.

The refrains are repeated in the hymns up to forty times; hence their potential subconscious influence on the faithful was important, influence that may even be strengthened by quotations and allusions to biblical passages,<sup>108</sup> especially in the New Testament. In fact,

<sup>103</sup> For the metrics of the kontakion in general see J. Koder, “Kontakion und politischer Vers,” *JÖB* 33 (1983): 45–56, and idem, “Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum,” 71–73, 85–89.

<sup>104</sup> Οὐ χωρίζομαι ὑμῶν· ἐγὼ εἰμι μεθ’ ὑμῶν καὶ οὐδείς καθ’ ὑμῶν: Romanos, H. 48.

<sup>105</sup> Σῶτερ, σῶσον με: Romanos, H. 23.

<sup>106</sup> ῾Ρῦσαι πάντας τῆς ὀργῆς στοργῇ σου τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς, λυτρωτὰ τοῦ παντός: Romanos, H. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Λαοὶ εἰπώμεν· εὐλογημένος ὁ τεχθεὶς Θεὸς ἡμῶν, δόξα σοι: Romanos, H. 13.

<sup>108</sup> At least in the following seventeen hymns: H. 8: Psalm 39:13 and 49:1; H. 10: Psalm 73:12, Isaiah 9:5; H. 22: Wisdom 6:7 and 8:3; H. 24: John 6:58; H. 25: Isaiah 9:1; H. 26: John 11:23, 25; H. 28: Tobit 13:7; H. 29: Luke 15:21; H. 31: 1 Peter 5:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:26; H. 37: Ephesians

<sup>98</sup> Πάτερ ἐπουράνιε, φιλόστοργε, φίλάνθρωπε,  
ἴλεως, ἴλεως, ἴλεως γενοῦ ἡμῖν,  
ὁ πάντων ἀνεχόμενος καὶ πάντας ἐκδεχόμενος.  
(Romanos, H. 33, pr2, trans. E. Lash [n. 1 above])

<sup>99</sup> Souda, α 190, quoting the hymn “On the Holy Theophany” (H. 16), alluding to 1 Timothy 6:16.

<sup>100</sup> For the metrics of the refrains see Koder, “Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum,” 73–85.

<sup>101</sup> Romanos, H. 14.

<sup>102</sup> Romanos, H. 24.

this occurs in some twenty cases; some characteristic examples for quotations:

John 6:58: . . . the heavenly bread of incorruption<sup>109</sup>

John 11:23 and 25: You are the life and the resurrection!<sup>110</sup>

Luke 15:21: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against You!<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, we observe (nearly as expected) that the meaning of the refrain is also very expressive and forceful, exceeding the stanzas in expressive power. There is, however, one difficulty: The audience (or the reader) expects in principle the squaring of the circle, namely, that the refrain is logically connected to the contents of the immediately preceding stanza *and* that it has a general validity, an intellectual relationship to the basic motif of the hymn. Hence, the results of the endeavors of the poet are, at first glance, uneven in some ways. Of course, in some hymns the harmony of the basic intention and the refrain is excellent, as for example in the first hymn “On the Nativity”: . . . *a little child, God before the ages*.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly successful in most of the hymns on the Resurrection and in one on Lazarus is the use of the keyword “he was resurrected” (ἀνέστη) or “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις), as it refers not only to the main message of these hymns but also to the central issue of the salvation of mankind; see, for example: *The Lord is risen*,<sup>113</sup> or: *He will be resurrected and he will rise up saying: “You are the Life and Resurrection,”*<sup>114</sup> or: *The Life and the Resurrection*.<sup>115</sup>

Yet in other cases the conformity of the refrain with the text of the preceding stanza is not satisfying. An extreme case is the hymn “On the Sacrifice of Abraham,”

where the refrain *Since he alone is good, the Savior of our souls*<sup>116</sup> is strikingly contradictory to the tenor of many of its stanzas, especially when Isaac’s mother Sarah is speaking. Another similar example is the hymn “On the Massacre of the Innocents” with its refrain *Because his power will soon be destroyed*.<sup>117</sup> But, of course, in both aforementioned cases, even these refrains correspond with the meaning of the hymns as a whole, and most of the faithful were probably well acquainted with the outcome of the related biblical episodes.

## Summary

The preceding considerations can be summarized by the following hypothesis on changes of imperial propaganda in the late fifth century and through the sixth century.<sup>118</sup> No later than the lifetime of Romanos Melodos, the potential for using the kontakion as a means of mass propaganda was realized by the emperor(s) and the “ruling class.”<sup>119</sup> To what extent the authors in the era of Justinian (and later?)—principally (if not exclusively) Romanos the Melode, because we do not know of other hymnographers<sup>120</sup> with an equivalent oeuvre—were aware of this propagandistic change (and their “manipulation”) is not always clear. In certain cases, and of course in some of the kontakia mentioned above (H. 14, 43, 47, and 54), the consciousness seems to be clear, but in a certain number of other cases the author may have acted

4.10; H. 43: Hosea 13:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:55; H. 45: John 11:25; H. 46: John 20:28; H. 48: Matthew 28:20 and Romans 8:31; H. 50: 2 Timothy 4:8; H. 51: Matthew 25:11 and Luke 13:25; H. 55: 1 Timothy 2:4.

109 ἄρτος ἀφθαρσίας ἐπουράνιος: Romanos, H. 24.

110 Σὺ εἰ ζωὴ καὶ ἀνάστασις: Romanos, H. 26.

111 Ἥμαρτον, πάτερ, εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνώπιόν σου: Romanos, H. 29.

112 παιδίον νέον, ὁ πρὸ αἰώνων θεός: Romanos 10.refrain.

113 ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος: Romanos 41.refrain.

114 Ἀναστήσεται, στήσεται λέγων· Σὺ εἰ ζωὴ καὶ ἀνάστασις: Romanos 26.refrain (“he” referring to Lazarus).

115 ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἀνάστασις: Romanos 45.refrain. Other hymns: H. 40, 42, 44, 52.

116 ὅτι μόνος ἀγαθὸς ὁ σωτὴρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν, Romanos 3.refrain.

117 ὅτι τὸ κράτος αὐτοῦ καθαιρεῖται ταχύ, Romanos 15.refrain (“his” referring to King Herod).

118 During the fall term 2001/2 a series of lectures at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften was dedicated to the theme “Was Antiquity a Media Society? Information and Communication from Ancient Egypt to Byzantium.” The papers were published as *Mediengesellschaft Antike? Information und Kommunikation vom Alten Ägypten bis Byzanz*, ed. U. Peter and St. J. Seidlmayer (Berlin, 2006). T. Pratsch, C. Marksches, C. Ludwig, and U. Peter treat Byzantine topics. They do not deal directly with the content of this article, though Ludwig’s article, “Mittel der Manipulation: Ein kirchengeschichtlicher Kurswechsel im byzantinischen Reich,” 131–49, gives useful hints to the theoretical background.

119 In fact, the *Akathistos Hymnos*, probably the earliest surviving *kontakion*, was already a means of propagating certain truths of faith and ecclesiastical policy.

120 One of the rare exceptions is the already-mentioned anonymous author of the *kontakion* “On the Inauguration of St. Sophia” (ed. Trypanis, *Early Cantica* [n. 72 above], 139–47), dated to Christmas eve of 562.



subconsciously or unconsciously as an “accomplice” of the emperor, because in the end he was—like other writers in his time—at least partially a “victim” of the policy of propaganda and (dis-)information of the emperor Justinian (and other rulers as well).<sup>121</sup>

While taking into consideration other internal factors such as the need for an easily understandable linguistic level, lively dialogues, and comprehensible melodies and rhythms, it seems justified to stress the function of the refrain as an immediate connecting link between the cantor (in his position as representative of the *leitourgos*)

and the faithful congregation. Insofar as the latter were all imperial subjects, the refrain also could have served in the field of political ideology as an element to strengthen loyalty to the emperor.<sup>122</sup>

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**121** See R. D. Scott, “Malalas, the Secret History, and Justinian’s Propaganda,” *DOP* 39 (1985): 99–109.

**122** Bibliographical addenda to n. 31: W. J. Hamblin and D. Seely, *Solomon’s Temple: Myth and History* (London, 2007); to n. 40: J. Koder, “Noch nicht einmal Grieche war er—Odysseas Elytis über die Sprache des Romanos Melodos,” in *Epea Pteroenta: Růženě Dostálové k narozeninám*, ed. M. Kulhánková and K. Ludová (Brno, 2009), 176–190; to n. 64: J. Koder, “Positionen der Theologie des Romanos Melodos,” in *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 143, no. 2 (Vienna, 2008), 25–56.